

SIRARPIE DER NERSESSIAN

MISS Der Nersessian came to this country in 1930. Her association with Dumbarton Oaks began informally some years later when she was Professor of the History of Art at Wellesley College, and when Dumbarton Oaks was still the private residence of Mr. and Mrs. Bliss. Her formal relationship began in 1944 when she came here as a Senior Fellow, at the same time as did the late Professor A. A. Vasiliev, who in subsequent years was such a good friend of hers. There was no permanent faculty in those days; but when a faculty was created in 1946 she was appointed one of its members with the title of Professor of Byzantine Art and Archaeology. In 1953 she became Henri Focillon Professor and, at the same time, Deputy Director of Studies, as an *alter ego* to the late Professor A. M. Friend, Jr. In the following year, when illness forced Professor Friend to resign, she was Acting Director of Studies, and she took up this position once more, selflessly and loyally, during a term in 1960. She retired in 1963.

Throughout her years at Dumbarton Oaks Miss Der Nersessian managed to combine complete devotion to the needs of the institution with active and productive scholarship. The researches she carried out as a member of the faculty bore fruit in the two massive volumes of the catalog of the Armenian manuscripts in the Chester Beatty Collection, in the catalog of the Armenian manuscripts of the Freer Gallery, in a monograph on the Church of Aght'amar, and in a book on the great period of Armenian miniature painting in Cilicia which Dumbarton Oaks looks forward to publishing. In addition, as will be seen from the accompanying Bibliography, she has written many articles and shorter studies which have appeared in these *Papers* and elsewhere. She contributed papers to no fewer than seven of the annual symposia held during the period of her association with Dumbarton Oaks, and she directed two of the symposia herself: one in 1948, on the Church of the Holy Apostles, and another, ten years later, on the Dumbarton Oaks Collection. Twice, upon invitation of the Department of Fine Arts at Harvard, she taught courses in Cambridge for a term.

These are the bare factual outlines. They do not tell of the intellectual caliber of her work nor of the calm assurance, steadiness, and charm with which it was performed. Nor do they cover her informal contributions to the life of Dumbarton Oaks which are as important as the formal ones. She has lent a helping hand in many and often highly intractable and time-consuming

institutional tasks, particularly in the publications field; her sound judgement, her quick and deep understanding of persons and issues, and her forthrightness in stating her convictions have been invaluable in the councils of the institution; and her graciousness and humor have lent warmth and friendliness to the atmosphere of its Common Room.

The loss which her retirement has meant for us is truly irreparable, and the loss is not ours alone, for this country as a whole is thus deprived of a leading mediaevalist and art historian. Of the honors she has received in recognition of her outstanding position and achievement only two shall be mentioned: the Order of St. Gregory the Illuminator, which His Holiness the Patriarch Catholicos of All Armenians bestowed on her when he visited this country in 1961 (she is the first woman ever to receive this decoration); and the Schlumberger Prize of the French Academy, which was a fitting welcome to her as she took up residence once more in her beloved France.

Such is the scholar and friend to whom, on the occasion of her seventieth birthday, Dumbarton Oaks affectionately dedicates the Twenty-first Volume of its *Papers*.

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